DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 252 862 CS 208 731

AUTHOR Nugent, Harold; Nugent, Susan
TITLE The Double-Entry Journal in Literature Classes.
PUB DATE Oct 84
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the New England Association of Teachers of English Fall Conference (Providence, RI, October 25-28, 1984).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Class Activities; Discussion (Teaching Technique); Higher Education; Learning Processes; *Learning Theories; *Literature Appreciation; Peer Evaluation; Reader Response; *Teaching Methods; *Writing Instruction
IDENTIFIERS *Affective Response; Bleich (David); *Journal Writing; Student Journals; Vygotsky (Levs)

ABSTRACT

The double-entry journal requires students to write affective response statements to literature readings and to compare such entries with those of classmates. Use of the double-entry journal is intended to activate students' prior learning and present feelings, foster collaborative learning, integrate major language skills, and encourage the creative and discovery processes. The first journal entry is a three-step response based on David Bleich's "Readings and Feelings." The underpinnings for encouraging affective response are found in a number of theories, including the psycholinguistic model of reading, studies in cognition, and subjective criticism. Students then share their entries in small group discussioins without teacher intervention. Vygotsky and others note that knowledge, thought, and learning are all acquired by sharing and testing ideas with knowledgeable peers. Concerns coming out of small group discussion often become the focus of subsequent class discussions. This integration of reading, writing, speaking, and listening is also based on Vygotsky's theories. After the discussion, the students write a second entry, with new insights, further understanding, and heightened perceptions. (HTH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED252862

The Double-Entry Journal in Literature Classes

Harold and Susan Nugent
Keene State College

We believe that to read without writing is an incomplete experience. It is within the experience of writing that we often discover what it is we could not previously articulate about our reading. The double-entry journal requires students to write affective response statements to readings, and to compare such entries with classmates. After discussion with peers and critical analysis of the literature, students write a second journal entry synthesizing insights gained from discussion, analysis, readings, and writings. This use of the journal leads students to discoveries throughout the process: while reading and while writing.

Our discussion in this paper examines the double-entry journal approach and reviews the theory behind it. We believe the double-entry journal will lead our students to achieving four goals: activating prior knowledge and present feelings, learning collaboratively, integrating major language skills, and creating and discovering. These goals are highly interactive in the double-entry journal approach. Included at the end of this article are several student responses to Robert Frost's "Birches" for reference and comparisons.

Within our literature classes, students are required to keep the double-entry journal throughout the semester. After each reading assignment, students make their first entry into the journal, an affective response to the reading. Because the first journal entry is affective, the writing leads students to discover the universal qualities of the literature. That is, readers find how their experiences are similar to those in the literature.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Harold E. Nugent
Susan M. Nugent
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS 208731

Although several approaches to subjective criticism exist, we have found the work of David Bleich, Readings and Feelings (1975), to be most useful in the classroom. Bleich suggests a three-step response, starting with what he calls the percept. First, the students are asked to find what they considered to be the most important word, phrase, or sentence within the literature being studied. In the student responses to "Birches" (see appendix), one student chose "conquered," another "across the lines of straighter darker trees," another "going and coming back," and the fourth wrote "reminiscing," even though this word does not appear within the poem. After selecting the word, students support their response with explanations.

Following these explanations, readers respond affectively to this selection. They try to express how they feel about what they have perceived as most important within the literature. This section is not an evaluation of the literature, a frequent student assumption, but rather a response to the reader's own perceptions. The affect asks the reader to describe the raw emotions related to the perception. Usually these are familiar terms - anger, love, jealousy, indignation, contentment, resentment and so forth. Sometimes the stimulus touches a primordial feeling that the intellect can not readily describe. Nevertheless, the questions probe further: What are your feelings about "conquered"? What feelings are provoked by the entire work? As one reader said of "Birches," "Frost has hit a nerve with this poem." Expressing these feelings leads to further understanding.

The third step of the affective response, the association, requires writers/readers to consider times in their lives when they have had similar experiences and/or feelings. Although steps one and two usually prepare students for this part of the response, sometimes students are at a loss here.

For example, when reading "Oedipus Rex," students became so involved in the mother-son marriage that they could not recognize how this literature is universal. But when they re-examined words and phrases they had identified as being most important (e.g. "fate and free will," "blind to truth," "the dangers of truth," "pride"), these students were able to recognize themselves within the literature. Focusing on their initial responses will help them develop understanding and will lead to more associations. The first journal entry, then, is this three-step affective response, each section providing opportunities for discovery about the literature, and about self while writing.

These affective response statements activate prior knowledge and present feelings, our first goal. Underpinnings for this objective are found in a number of theories including the psycholinguistic model of reading, studies in cognition, and subjective criticism. Frank Smith's observation that "Nothing is comprehended if it does not reflect or elaborate on what the reader already knows," (62) affirms our own learning experiences. Similarly Louise Rosenblatt argues convincingly that a poem can only be created when there is a "coming-together or compenetration" of reader and text. The reader, she continues "brings to the text his past experience and present personality" (12). We agree that it is not just prior knowledge that must be brought to conscious awareness but also emotions and feelings associated with both present and past experiences. Which comes first? David Bleich makes his preference clear when he writes that "all biographies of those who achieved the most and best in civilization show that not only does feeling precede knowledge but that knowledge is achieved only because of the passion to know and discover. The passion precedes the knowledge -not vice versa" (3). With activated knowledge and feelings, the reader interacts with the text. We

should add here that subjective criticism does not negate the value of the text. But instead, it makes clear, as Rosenblatt states, "The finding of meanings involves both the author's text and what the reader brings to it" (14).

As a result of their first journal entry with its affective response, students come to class prepared to share their entries and to listen to those of others. In these small group discussions, each student begins to recognize various levels of response as well as any serious misreadings or oversimplifications of the literature without teacher intervention. Sometimes there is excessive detachment from the text or over-eagerness to appropriate the poem to some larger preoccupation of the reader. Here is an opportunity for the instructor to intervene benefically. These problems can be addressed with such questions as, "Why do I think I saw the poem in just this way? Is there anything I know about myself that must explain this particular kind of perception?" Reader responses become the object of objectivity.

During small group discussion, members engage in synthesizing, looking for commonality in the group's perceptions, feelings, and associations. Initial responses are compared to the group's response with members noting what might be added to their own statements. Students jot down ways their responses differ from others, and make notes for future revisions.

We consciously promote collaborative learning with the double-entry journal and related activites. The use of small groups becomes our main vehicle. Ken Bruffee observes that common to both Kuhn and Vygotsky is the view that knowledge, thought, and learning are involved with "ways of seeing tested and shared by a community of knowledgeable peers" (163). Bruffee goes on to quote Richard Rorty that what is special about language is that it lets us "enter a community whose members exchange justification of assumptions and

other actions with one another" (167). Placing the small group work between the two journal entries provides a "community" in which readers and writers can test and share their knowledge and feelings.

Concerns coming out of small group discussions often become the focus of class discussions. For example, in a discussion of Hawthorne's "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," one group of students wished to pursue further Hawthorne's use of light and dark throughout the story while others wanted to analyze further the dream qualities in this work. Still another group explored the allegorical Robin as young colonial America. At this point, we have no directives for teachers, but rather we believe that each teacher should handle literature as he or she prefers. Our own approaches differ here as each of us focuses on a different school of criticism. But whichever criticism is preferred, it takes on new meaning when the reader examines how an author created the perceptions and the feelings previously identified by the reader. Imagery, symbolism, motifs, archetypes, all have new meaning as a result of the process previously described.

The integrating of reading, writing, speaking, and listening, emphasized throughout this approach, generates new ideas, new connections, and new insights. Vygotsky in Mind in Society observes that the "most significant moment in the course of intellectual development, which gives birth to the purely human forms of practical and abstract intelligence, occurs when speech and practical activity, two previously completely independent lines of development, converge..." (quoted in Bruffee, 160). Our experiences would have us rephrase this to say that it is a most significant time in intellectual development of students when all four actitivies of reading, writing,

speaking, and listening converge. Bruffee emphasizes this need for integrating: "In order to learn to write, we must learn to become our own representatives of an assenting community of peers with whom we speak and to whom we listen in our heads" (161). We believe that the sequence of reading about literature, writing responses in the journal, talking and listening about these responses in small groups, and then synthesizing these findings in a second journal entry provides the full exploration of the subject and "the coming to know" that only integration of all four skills can achieve.

After writing the affective response, sharing this response in the small groups, and discussing the literature in class, the reader/writer returns to the journal. With new insights, with further understanding, and with heightened perceptions, the student writes the second entry. Here is the opportunity for each writer to discover and to articulate his or her own thoughts and feelings.

Some writers return to the affective response statement for clarification, for new information, for a new examination of the literature. These writers/readers note how their responses have changed and look for clues to such changes. One student wrote that she listened to others in her group discuss their perceptions from "Flight" and realized that they all chose sentences with "deep meaning toward Pepe becoming a man." Her first selection, she observed, "was not deep or philosophical but only had a meaning to me." (This response is worth a conference and/or class discussion in itself.) The group discussion, she goes on to write in her second entry, "opened my eyes to a lot of things I had missed and made me stop and think... brought out my true feelngs." Many things are simultaneously occurring in the double-entry journal process, not the least is what Louise Rosenblatt says is necessary for a reader's creation of a poem from a text: "...an active,

self-ordering, and self-corrective process" (11). The change in the reader does not come from an authoritative figure full of critical canon, but rather from a highly activated sense of the worth of the student's own experience combined with reading the text, writing about prior experience and feelings, and discussing these with a community of peers.

The second journal entry provides other students the opportunity to pursue questions raised in class discussions concerning the literature. The four examples of journal entries on "Birches" are representative of this genre. Each writer brings small group concerns, class comments, and further examination of the literature to this second journal entry. Here is the time for synthesis, for reflection, and for integration of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The connections are many.

Our final goal of enhancing creativity and discovery is achieved by students integrating language skills, activating knowledge and feelings, and collaborating with peers. When we are involved in all four language skills, especially writing, we can more fully explore the subject. When we activate our prior knowledge and present feelings before and during the reading, writing, speaking, and listening, we can maximize our chances of both learning and discovering. As Donald Murray says about writing, "We discover what we know and then what we need to know" (3). The students ultimately discover that reading, writing, listening, and speaking can produce new understandings and enrich knowledge. They acquire, as David Bleich states, "not just a moral here and a message there, but a genuinely new concept of one's values and tastes, as well as one's prejudices and learning difficulties" (3-4).

The bottom line, as the accountants say, for the double-entry journal aproach is that this process has the potential to contribute to the creating of a work of literature from a text and to the discovering of new insights in both reading and life. As one of our students said, "Our journals often know more than we do."

Susan Monroe Nugent
Harold Nugent
Keene State College

The Double-Entry Journal in the Literature Class

Resources

Bleich, David. Readings and Feelings: An Introduction to Subjective Criticism. Urbana: NCTE, 1975.

Bruffee, Kenneth. "Writing and Reading as Collaborative or Social Acts." The Writer's Mind: Writing As a Mode of Thinking. Ed. Janice Hayes, et. al. Urbana: NCTE, 1983.

Fulwiler, Toby. "The Personal Connection: Journal Writing." Language Connections: Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum. Ed. Toby Fulwiler and Art Young. Urbana: NCTE, 1982.

Murray, Donald. Write to Learn. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984.

Rosenblatt, Louise M. The Reader, the Text, the Poem. Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univesity Press, 1978.

Smith, Frank. Essays Into Literacy Exeter, N.H.: Heinemann Educational Books, 1983.

The Double-Entry Journal in the Literature Classroom
Harold and Susan Nugent
Keene State College

Student Double Entry Journals for "Birches"

Student 1 - Chris

First Entry:
If you told me months ago that I would actually enjoy poetry, I'd think you were nuts! I think the key word here is "conquered." Frost seems to have been disappointed by his successes. He learned all his father knew, and more. He was once himself a swinger of birches. Innocent, inexperienced. Discovery held vast pleasures. You grow and learn. "One by one he subdued his father's trees." "He took the stiffness out of them." When the unknown has been conquered and the experience learned, the stiffness is malleable.

When life ceases to have purpose, one longs for the days when each was a new experience. Something or someone yet to conquer. Frost has hit a nerve with this poem. Who hasn't wished that they could go back in time? Not to better days, but to a time when there were more forks in the road. More options. "One could do worse than be a swinger of birches." Thank God that some sixty-eight years later that most of us are swingers of birches.

Life experience? Through the wisdom of my years I've learned you're never down till you're dead. When you refuse to learn more, you cease to live. "A swinger of birches" can adapt to almost anything. A change in career at mid-stream. A new career upon retirement. There's a lot of birches out there waiting to be conquered. The forest is eternal.

Second Entry:

I guess I've chosen the sociological path for this entry. In my affective response I saw Frost as drawing an analogy between nature and experience. Because I chose this point of view, I took a look at the period in Frost's life when "Birches" was written.

Frost spent half his childhood growing up in New England. His education at Harvard was cut short by an illness. Ironically the next seven years of his life were spent as a farmer. He resumed his education and became a teacher until he moved to England in 1912. In two short years he sky-rocketed to fame. He returned to the U.S. in 1915.

In 1916 he wrote "Birches." I see a man smothering from fame and notoriety. "Weary of considerations." With fame come demands. Whether self-imposed or not, there is that unspoken promise that each work be better than the last. The imagery more fetching, the thought more profound. Success so oppressive that the heart and mind yearn for release. "I'd like to get away from earth for awhile."

When Frost speaks of coming back and beginning over, he doesn't mean as a child, as I once thought. He means as a man unburdened by profundities and demands. A man whose thoughts are as crystalline water in a free-flowing sea. What peace!

Student 2 - Lana

First Entry:
The most important phrase is "across the lines of straighter darker trees." This line emphasizes the fact that the birch trees are being bent, either by the heaviness of ice or by a young boy. This line also emphasizes the whiteness and the weakness (but they never break) of the birch trees. Frost feels that the birch trees ought to be bent by a young boy swinging on them rather than by the ice storms which he seems to have a dislike for. He also mentions that he used to swing on them when he was young and seems to have a wistful feeling about it.

The poem makes me feel sad for the birch trees and angry at the ice storms for bending and killing them. Then again, in regard to the young boy swinging on them, it seems that the poem implies, and makes me feel, that it is a birch tree's fate to be bent by a storm or a young boy. So, then one can come to accept that idea.

As for an experience related to this, I used to live in Maine and we had some birch trees in front of my house. When, in winter, the ice used to freeze onto them and bend them over, I used to try to break and shake off the ice so they would stand up again. But it would never work. I used to feel sad then, too.

Second entry:

The poem, "Birches" by Robert Frost, implies that everyone or almost everyone has had a similar experience. Frost does not feel there is a need to describe what a birch tree looks like before an ice storm hits, so he assumes that one knows what a birch tree looks like. When he says that ice-storms bend the birch tree down to say, he says next, "Often you must have seen them." Frost then goes on to explain exactly what the trees look like after an ice-storm and tells his experience in such an emotional way that the reader, who must have experienced something like this, feels that emotion, too.

On line seventeen he says, "You may see their trunks arching in the woods" and follows with the simile,"Like girls on hands and knees that throw their hair before them over their heads to dry in the sun." Frost feels that because one has experienced this before, too, then one can read the simile, apply it to the line before, and envision the picture in one's mind through reminiscence.

When Frost mentions the young boy who swings on the trees, he does it with such detail that the reader assumes he did once or many times a long time ago. But his memory of it is vivid and may recapture a moment for the reader who may have experienced the same thing. Frost then directly states how much he would like to go back and has the reader wishing for the same thing.

So, by the end of the poem, Frost has the reader reliving his childhood, wanting to go back, and (almost) feeling sorry for bending the trees in the first place. But he consoles the reader with his rationalizations that "Ice storms bend the trees down to stay," and "One could do worse than be a swinger of birches."

Student 3 - Mark

First Entry:

"going and coming back" He wants to do all the same things over again but he wants to end up where he is now (at the present). "I dream of going back to be." He wishes to go back and start all over. Perhaps because the climb was so gratifying. Or is it the fall that's the fun part. Falling lightly from a tree may be enjoyable but not falling from success (glory). Does youth climb the tree and age (loss of innocence?) bring the fall? What of the branches? They bend but they never break. Is this someone trying to change the world (or people) coming extremely close but not changing them completely in the long run? Do the branches represent a resistance to change? Or perhaps the friends and loved ones who help to break the fall? He doesn't want to fall from the tree. He wants to dip its top and set him down again. This way not only going up the tree would be good but coming down would be, too. "This would be good, both going and coming back."

I remember reading something similar to this once. Not a poem, but.... About a man and his children. Describing childhood as a forest where children swing from branch to branch occasionally looking back and waving at their father who stands just at the forest's edge but cannot enter. Then the child swings onto the tree of knowledge and the forest of childhood slowly disappears because "It disappears if you have to look for it." "What is genius? It is the power to be a boy again, at will."

Relates to everyone's yearning to go back and try again (do it over) knowing they'd probably screw it up again.

Second Entry:

Birch trees - part of childhood you can't go back to but is always there. Why birch trees? Climb to success. The branches break the fall. What do the straighter darker trees represent? The boy represents himself or others he knows. What do ice storms mean?

The loneliness of the boy, the cruelty of the society. Branches whipping in the eye. He wishes to leave the earth but then says he doesn't want to.

How are we all swingers of birches? How are we all swingers of birches?

The swinging of birches represents a happier time in life. When we are young and do not have so many adult things to worry about. One adult thing is a yearning for the easier life of childhood. Every person has been a child (at least physically) and therefore every person can yearn for the simpler days of childhood. People sit around wishing to return to the innocence of the birch swinger, for if we were to swing on the birch now, it would surely break. When grown-up troubles lie heavily on our heads, we yearn to become swingers of birches once again. We are jealous of the youngsters we see swinging now because we know our birch swinging days are gone forever.

Student 4 - Judy

First Entry:

The main word that comes to mind when reading the poem is reminiscing. The poet is talking about birches and how many young boys must have swung on them. Later on in the poem he admits that he has also swung on the blessed birch tree. He thinks back describing the tree that stretches out toward heaven. He thinks about leaving earth awhile and then coming back to it and beginning over because he wants to relive his memories or to experience new ones. He does not want to be misunderstood in that he does want to return.

I really enjoyed the poem. One could easily imagine the tree being described and the environment. It gave the effect of a nice warm feeling. It taught me how things as simple as a tree could bring so much enjoyment to a little boy.

I have a similar experience. My twin brother and I had a big tree in front of our house. In the summer when it was really hot out, my brother and I would climb the big tree and sit on a branch and talk to each other. Sometimes we would have contests to see who could climb the highest. My brother would always win because I was and still am scared of heights. Every time I go out the front door and see the tree, I always remember the "good old days" with my brother and myself.

Second entry:

Archetypes are themes, images, and narrative patterns that are universal and thus embody some enduring aspect of man's experience. The theme that is dominant in "Birches" is the theme of going back to one's childhood.

Everyone, sometime in their lives, has wished for reliving their childhood days when worries were few and time was spent swinging on branches. The old expression, "if only I was young again," must have been stated by every adult.

In the poem "Birches," the author yearns for the happiness that he once had when he was a young boy swinging on the birch tree. He reminisces about the good old days stating that he wished that he had an opportunity to relive the "care free" days. This yearning is shared with a majority of adults and even teen-agers. In the poem he describes the appearance of the birch trees and he writes, "often you must have seen them." This is implying that a majority of the people reading the poem have been exposed to the beautiful sight.